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## *Cease-Fire Developments*

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## *Cease-Fire Developments*

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LAOSPhoumi Returns

Phoumi Vongvichit, the high-ranking "special adviser" to the Lao Communist negotiating team, left Sam Neua for Vientiane on 24 April, presumably to resume direct private discussions with Prime Minister Souvanna. The two leaders personally worked out all important details of the peace agreement signed in late February.

During Phoumi's absence, his subordinates maintained a dialogue with government officials, but were obviously not empowered to reach any binding agreements. They showed some flexibility on political questions, but stuck to tough proposals on supervision, cease-fire demarcation, and other military matters. Once Phoumi sits down with Souvanna, the Communist strategy on negotiating the details of the peace agreement should become apparent.

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The Military Situation

Extensive Communist shelling and a ground attack on 22 April forced a government unit from outposts some ten miles northwest of Bouam Long.

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In recent weeks, the Communists have been systematically eliminating forward positions around Bouam Long through small-scale attacks. This pattern of fighting is likely to continue, but the enemy forces in the area are not strong enough to launch a major assault on Bouam Long itself.

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SOUTH VIETNAMAccommodation in Kontum

Increasing contact has occurred between North Vietnamese military officers and South Vietnamese Army and government personnel in southern Kontum Province over the past several weeks. The earliest contacts [redacted]

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[redacted] resulted in the diminution of fighting along the major highway linking the provincial capitals of Pleiku and Kontum.

Subsequent, almost daily, face-to-face meetings between the commander of the North Vietnamese 95B Regiment, the deputy chief for security in Kontum Province, and a Ranger Group commander have led to the release of some government troops along with their weapons. The Communists are now negotiating for free passage of their men across Route 14 to the east.

The commander of the South Vietnamese 23rd Division and presumably the Kontum province chief are aware of the high-level contacts. They probably do not know about, nor would they approve of [redacted]

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[redacted] contacts between low-level South Vietnamese officers and the Communists. Lower level contacts similar to those in Kontum are undoubtedly going on in other sectors of South Vietnam, but it is not known whether these have succeeded in curbing military activity. [redacted]

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Clearing the Mekong

The South Vietnamese 9th Division is making slow progress in its attempt to clear the banks of the Mekong River between Hong Ngu and the Cambodian

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[redacted]

border. Regional military officials are confident that the South Vietnamese will be able to drive the Communist forces back across the border. They then plan to build a strong artillery base near the river's edge to thwart further Communist drives into the area.

The campaign is taking longer than expected, according to the deputy regional commander, because enemy units are fresh, well-armed, and well-supplied. They also appear to have excellent knowledge of the terrain and have been able to rotate their units regularly from secure base areas across the border. The South Vietnamese forces have not been able to rotate or move as freely, and some troops are showing signs of strain and fatigue. [redacted]

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CAMBODIAThe Military Situation

Government forces met only token resistance on 23 April when they reoccupied the village of Siem Reap ten miles south of Phnom Penh along Route 2. They are now attempting to advance south along the highway. The suburb of Takhmau, five miles south of the capital, received light harassing fire again on 24 April, but no casualties were reported. Elsewhere in the capital area, Communist forces still hold a section of Route 1 some seven miles north of Neak Luong. In the south, Khmer Communist troops supported by 105-mm. howitzer fire again attacked the outer defenses of Takeo city on 23 and 24 April, but were repulsed. At last report, the situation around Takeo was calm after extensive US air strikes.

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